



El through time

El depicted with two lions representing the planet Venus on the back of the handle of the [Gebel el-Arak Knife](#) جبل عرقة

Ēl is a [Northwest Semitic](#) word and name translated into English as either 'god' or 'God' or left untranslated as El, depending on the context.

In the [Levant](#) as a whole, El or IL was the supreme god, the father of humankind and all creatures and the husband of the Goddess [Asherah](#) as attested in the tablets of [Ugarit](#).

The word El was found at the top of a list of gods as the Ancient of Gods or the Father of all Gods, in the ruins of the Royal Library of the [Ebla](#) civilization, in the archaeological site of [Tell Mardikh](#) in Syria dated to 2300 BC. He may have been a desert god at some point, as the myths say that he had two wives and built a sanctuary with them and his new children in the desert. El had fathered many gods, but most important

were [Hadad](#), [Yam](#) and [Mot](#), each of whom has similar attributes to the Greek gods [Zeus](#), [Poseidon](#) or [Ophion](#) and [Hades](#) or [Thanatos](#) respectively. Ancient Greek mythographers identified El with [Cronus](#) (not [Chronos](#)).

Cognate forms are found throughout the Semitic languages with the exception of the ancient [Ge'ez language](#) of [Ethiopia](#). Forms include [Ugaritic](#) ʾil, pl. ʾlm; [Phoenician](#) ʾl pl. ʾlm, [Hebrew](#) ʾēl, pl. ʾēlīm; [Aramaic](#) ʾl, [Arabic](#) ʾilāh; [Akkadian](#) ilu, pl. ilāti. The original meaning may have been 'strength, power'. In northwest Semitic usage ʾl was both a generic word of any 'god' and the special name or title of a particular god who was distinguished from other gods as being the god, or even in the monotheistic sense, God. Ēl is listed at the head of many pantheons. El was the father god among the [Canaanites](#). However, because the word sometimes refers to a god other than the great god Ēl, it is frequently ambiguous as to whether Ēl followed by another name means the great god Ēl with a particular epithet applied or refers to another god entirely. For example, in the Ugaritic texts ʾil mlk is understood to mean 'Ēl the King' but ʾil hd as 'the god [Hadad](#)'.

In Ugaritic an alternate plural form meaning 'gods' is ʾilhm, equivalent to Hebrew [ʾelōhīm](#) 'gods'. But in Hebrew this word is also used for semantically-singular 'God' or 'god', is indeed by the most normal word for 'god' or 'God' in the singular (as well as for 'gods'). The stem ʾl is found prominently in the earliest strata of east Semitic, northwest Semitic and south Semitic groups. Personal names including the stem ʾl are found with similar patterns both in [Amorite](#) and South Arabic which indicates that probably already in [Proto-Semitic](#) ʾl was both a generic term for 'god' and the common name or title of a single particular 'god' or 'God'.

Ēl in Proto-Sinaitic, Phoenician, Aramaic, and Hittite texts

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A proto-Sinaitic mine inscription from Mount Sinai reads 'ld'Im understood to be vocalized as 'il dū 'ôlmi, 'Ēl Eternal' or 'God Eternal'.

The Egyptian god [Ptah](#) is given the title dū gitti 'Lord of [Gath](#)' in a prism from [Lachish](#) which has on its opposite face the name of [Amenhotep II](#) (c. [1435–1420 BCE](#)) The title dū gitti is also found in Serābitṭ text 353. Cross (1973, p. 19) points out that Ptah is often called the lord (or one) of eternity and thinks it may be this identification of Ēl with Ptah that lead to the epithet 'olam 'eternal' being applied to Ēl so early and so consistently. (However in the Ugaritic texts Ptah is seemingly identified instead with the craftsman god Kothar-wa-Khasis.)

A [Phoenician](#) inscribed amulet of the [7th century BCE](#) from Arslan Tash may refer to Ēl. Rosenthal (1969, p. 658) translated the text: An eternal bond has been established for us. Ashshur has established (it) for us, and all the divine beings and the majority of the group of all the holy ones, through the bond of heaven and earth for ever, However the text is translated by Cross (1973, p. 17):

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In some inscriptions the name 'Ēl qōne 'arš meaning "'Ēl creator of Earth" appears, even including a late inscription at Leptis Magna in [Tripolitania](#) dating to [2nd century](#) (KAI. 129). In Hittite texts the expression becomes the single name Ilkunirsa, this Ilkunirsa appearing as the husband of Asherdu (Asherah) and father of 77 or 88 sons

In an Hurrian hymn to Ēl (published in Ugaritica V, text RS 24.278) he is called 'il brt and 'il dn which Cross (p. 39) takes as 'Ēl of the covenant' and 'Ēl the judge' respectively.

See [Baal Hammon](#) for the possibility that Ēl was identical with Ba'al Hammon who was worshipped as the supreme god in [Carthage](#).

Ēl among the Amorites

[Amorite](#) inscriptions from Zinčirli refer to numerous gods, sometimes by name, sometimes by title, especially by such titles as ilabrat 'god of the people'(?), il abīka 'god of your father', il abīni 'god of our father' and so forth. Various family gods are recorded, divine names listed as belong to a particular our father' and so forth. Various family gods are recorded, divine names listed as belong to a particular family or clan, sometimes by title and sometimes by name, including the name Il 'god'. In Amorite personal names the most common divine elements are Il ('God'), [Hadad/Adad](#), and [Dagon](#). It is likely that Il is also very often the god called in Akkadian texts Amurru or Il Amurru.

Ēl in Ugarit

For the [Canaanites](#), El or Il was the supreme god, the father of mankind and all creatures. He may have been a desert god at some point as the myths say that he had two wives and built a sanctuary with them and his new children in the desert. El had fathered many gods, but most important were [Hadad](#), [Yam](#) and [Mot](#), each share similar attributes to the Roman-Greco gods: [Zeus](#), [Poseidon](#) and [Hades](#) respectively.

Three pantheon lists found at [Ugarit](#) begin with the four gods 'il-'ib (which according to Cross [1973; p. 14] is the name of a generic kind of deity, perhaps the divine ancestor of the people), Ēl, Dagnu (that is [Dagon](#)), and [Baal](#) Ṣapān (that is the god Haddu or [Hadad](#)). Though Ugarit had a large temple dedicated to Dagon and another to Hadad, there was no temple dedicated to Ēl.

Ēl is called again and again Tōru 'Ēl 'Bull Ēl' or 'the bull god'. He is bātnyu binwāti 'Creator of creatures', 'abū banī 'ili 'father of the gods', and 'abū 'adami 'father of man'. He is qāniyunu 'ôlam 'creator eternal' (the epithet 'ôlam appearing in Hebrew form in the Hebrew name of God 'ēl 'ôlam

[Ashima](#) | [Astarte](#) | [Atargatis](#) | [Baal](#) | [Berith](#) | [Dagon](#) | [Derceto](#) | El | [Elyon](#) | [Eshmun](#) | [Hadad](#) | [Kothar](#) | [Mot](#) | [Moloch](#) | [Qetesh](#) | [Resheph](#) | [Shalim](#) | [Yarikh](#) | [Yam](#)

[Mesopotamian deities](#)

[Adad](#) | [Amurru](#) | [An/Anu](#) | [Anshar](#) | [Ashur](#) | [Abzu/Apsu](#) | [Enki/Ea](#) | [Enlil](#) | [Ereshkigal](#) | [Inanna/Ishtar](#) | [Kingu](#) | [Kishar](#) | [Lahmu](#) & [Lahamu](#) | [Marduk](#) | [Mummu](#) | [Nabu](#) | [Nammu](#) | [Nanna/Sin](#) | [Nergal](#) | [Ningizzida](#) | [Ninhursag](#) | [Ninlil](#) | [Tiamat](#) | [Utu/Shamash](#)

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'God Eternal' in [Genesis](#) 21.23). He is ḥātikuka 'your patriarch'. Ēl is the grey-bearded ancient one, full of wisdom, malku 'king', 'abū šamīma 'father of years', 'ēl gibbōr 'Ēl the warrior'. He is also named lṭpn of unknown meaning, variously rendered as Latpan, Latipan, or Lutpani.

The mysterious Ugaritic text "Shachar and Shalim" tells how (perhaps near the beginning of all things) Ēl came to shores of the sea and saw two women who bobbed up and down. Ēl was sexually aroused and took the two with him, killed a bird by throwing a staff at it, and roasted it over a fire. He asked the women to tell him when the bird was fully cooked, and to then address him either as husband or as father, for he would thenceforward behave to them as they call him. They saluted him as husband. He then lies with them, and they gave birth to Shachar 'Dawn' and Shalim 'Dusk'. Again Ēl lies with his wives and the wives give birth to the gracious gods, cleavers of the sea, children of the sea. The names of these wives are not explicitly provided, but some confusing rubrics at the beginning of the account mention the goddess [Athirat](#) who is otherwise Ēl's chief wife and the goddess Rahmay 'Merciful', otherwise unknown.

In the Ugaritic Baal cycle Ēl is introduced dwelling on (or in) Mount Lel (Lel possibly meaning 'Night') at the fountains of the two rivers at the spring of the two deeps. He dwells in a tent according to some interpretations of the text which may explain why he had no temple in Ugarit. As to the rivers and the spring of the two deeps, these might refer real streams, or to the mythological sources of the salt water ocean and the fresh water sources under the earth, or to the waters above the heavens and the waters beneath the earth.

In the episode of the "Palace of Ba'al", the god Ba'al/Hadad invites the "70 sons of Athirat" to a feast in his new palace. Presumably these sons have been fathered on Athirat by Ēl in following passages they seem be the gods ('ilm) in general or at least a large portion of them. The only sons of Ēl named individually in the Ugaritic texts are Yamm 'Sea', [Mot](#) 'Death', and '[Ashtar](#), who may be the chief and leader of most of the sons of Ēl. Ba'al/Hadad is a few times called Ēl's son rather than the son of Dagan as he is normally called, probably because Ēl is in the position of a clan-father to all the gods.

The fragmentary text RS 24.258 describes a banquet to which Ēl invites the other gods and then disgraces himself by becoming outrageously drunk and passing out after confronting an otherwise unknown Hubbay, "he with the horns and tail". The text ends with an incantation for the cure of some disease, possibly hangover.] Ēl in the greater [Levant](#) A proto-Sinaitic mine inscription from Mount Sinai reads 'ld'lm understood to be vocalized as 'il dū 'ōlmi, 'Ēl Eternal' or 'God Eternal'.

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[[edit](#)] Ēl in the Tanakh.

Ēl in Christian theology

According to [patristic](#) tradition, El was the first Hebrew name of God. [Dante Alighieri](#) in his [De vulgari eloquentia](#) suggests that the name was the first sound emitted by [Adam](#): While the first utterance of humans after birth is a cry of pain, Dante assumed that Adam could only have made an exclamation of joy, which at the same time was addressing his creator. In the [Divine commedia](#), however, Dante contradicts this by saying that God was called I in the language of Adam, and only named El in later Hebrew, but before the [confusion of tongues](#) (*Paradiso*, 26.134).

Ēl according to Sanchuniathon

In the [euhemeristic](#) account of [Sanchuniathon](#) Ēl (rendered Elus or called by his standard [Greek](#) counterpart [Cronus](#)) is not the creator god or first god. Ēl is rather the son of Sky and Earth. Sky and Earth are themselves children of 'Elyôn 'Most High'. Ēl is brother to the god [Bethel](#), to [Dagon](#), and to an unknown god equated with the Greek [Atlas](#), and to the goddesses [Aphrodite](#) /[Ashtart](#) , [Rhea](#) (presumably [Asherah](#)), and [Dione](#) (equated with [Baalat Gebal](#)). Ēl is father of [Persephone](#) who dies (presumably an otherwise unknown Semitic goddess of the dead) and of [Athene](#) (presumably the goddess 'Anat). Sky and Earth have separated from one another in hostility, but Sky insists on continuing to force himself on Earth and attempts to destroy the children born of such unions until at last Ēl, son of Sky and Earth, with the advice of the god [Thoth](#) and Ēl's daughter [Athene](#) attacks his father Sky with a sickle and spear of iron and drives him off for ever. So he and his allies the Eloim gain Sky's kingdom. In a later passage it is explained that Ēl castrated Sky. But one of Sky's concubines who was given to Ēl's brother Dagon was already pregnant by Sky and the son who is born of this union, called by Sanchuniathon Demarûs or Zeus, but once called by him Adodus, is obviously Hadad, the Baal of the Ugaritic texts who now becomes an ally of his grandfather Sky and begins to make war on Ēl.

Ēl has three wives, his sisters or half-sisters Aphrodite/Astarte ('Ashtart), Rhea (presumably Asherah), and Dione (identified by Sanchuniathon with Ba'alat Gebal the tutelary goddess of [Byblos](#), a city which Sanchuniathon says that Ēl founded).

Unfortunately [Eusebius of Caesarea](#), through whom Sanchuniathon is preserved, is not interested in setting the work forth completely or in order. But we are told that Ēl slew his own son Sadidus (a name that some commentators think might be a corruption of Shaddai, one of the epithets of the Biblical Ēl) and that Ēl also beheaded one of his daughters. Later, perhaps referring to this same death of Sadidus we are told:

But on the occurrence of a pestilence and mortality Cronus offers his only begotten son as a whole burnt-offering to his father Sky and circumcises himself, compelling his allies also to do the same.

A fuller account of the sacrifice appears later:

It was a custom of the ancients in great crises of danger for the rulers of a city or nation, in order to avert the common ruin, to give up the most beloved of their children for sacrifice as a ransom to the avenging daemons; and those who were thus given up were sacrificed with mystic rites. Cronus then, whom the Phoenicians call Elus, who was king of the country and subsequently, after his decease, was deified as the star [Saturn](#), had by a nymph of the country named Anobret an only begotten son, whom they on this account called Iedud, the only begotten being still so called among the Phoenicians; and when very great dangers from war had beset the country, he arrayed his son in royal apparel, and prepared an altar, and sacrificed him.

The account also relates that [Thoth](#):

... also devised for Cronus as insignia of royalty four eyes in front and behind ... but two of them quietly closed, and upon his shoulders four wings, two as spread for flying, and two as folded. And the symbol meant that Cronus could see when asleep, and sleep while waking: and similarly in the case of the wings, that he flew while at rest, and was at rest when flying. But to each of the other gods he gave two wings upon the shoulders, as meaning that they accompanied Cronus in his flight. And to Cronus

himself again he gave two wings upon his head, one representing the all-ruling mind, and one sensation.

This is the form under which Ēl/Cronus appears on coins from Byblos from the reign of [Antiochus IV \(175–164 BCE\)](#) four spread wings and two folded wings, leaning on a staff. Such images continued to appear on coins until after the time of [Augustus](#).

Ēl and Poseidon

A bilingual inscription from [Palmyra](#) (KAI. 11, p. 43) dated to the first century equates Ēl-Creator-of-the-Earth with the [Greek](#) god [Poseidon](#). Going back to the eighth century BCE the bilingual inscription at [Karatepe](#) in the [Taurus Mountains](#) equates Ēl-Creator-of-the-Earth to Luwian hieroglyphs read as da-a-ś, this being the Luwian form of the name of the [Babylonian](#) water god [Ea](#), lord of the abyss of water under the earth. (This inscription lists Ēl in second place in the local pantheon, following [Ba`al Shamîm](#) and preceding the Eternal Sun.)

Poseidon is known to have been worshipped in [Beirut](#), his image appearing on coins from that city.

Poseidon of Beirut was also worshipped at [Delos](#) where there was an association of merchants, shipmasters and warehousemen called the Poseidoniastae of Berytus founded in [110](#) or [109 BCE](#).

Three of the four chapels at its headquarters on the hill northwest of the Sacred Lake were dedicated to Poseidon, the [Tyche](#) of the city equated with Astarte (that is 'Ashtart), and to [Eshmun](#) إشمون

Also at Delos that association of Tyrians, though mostly devoted to [Heracles- Melqart](#), elected a member to bear a crown every year when sacrifices to Poseidon took place. A banker named

Philostratus donated two altars, one to Palaistine Aphrodite Urania ('Ashtart) and one to Poseidon "of [Ascalon](#)".

Though Sanchuniathon distinguishes Poseidon from his Elus/Cronus, this might be a splitting off of a particular aspect of Ēl in an euhemeristic account. Identification of an aspect of Ēl with Poseidon rather than with Cronus might have been felt to better fit with Hellenistic religious practice, if indeed this Phoenician Poseidon really is Ēl who dwells at the source of the two deeps in Ugaritic texts. More information is needed to be certain.

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